

Jews, Hindus show solidarity with Mumbai victims

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Jews and Hindus gathered at the Israeli consulate last week. [Paul Lungen photo]

TORONTO — Jewish and Hindu groups gathered at the Israeli consulate last week in a show of solidarity with the victims of the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

About 25 to 30 people braved cold and bitter winds as speakers from both communities paid tribute to those killed by Islamic extremists.

Innocent victims were murdered “in the name of a vicious ideology,” said Ron Banerjee, director of public relations for Canadian Hindu Advocacy (CHA).

They were victimized twice, Banerjee said – once by the terrorists themselves and then by the media, which suggested the killings were the result of oppression or marginalization felt by the perpetrators.

“The implication that they have some legitimate grievances is completely unacceptable,” he told The CJN.

In an interview after the event, which saw participants march along Bloor Street from the Israeli consulate to the Indian consulate, Banerjee said many Hindus “consider the State of Israel as our ideal. We would like India to be more like Israel. We admire the heroism of Israel and the Jewish people – a tough yet compassionate approach to minority rights and security considerations. It is a model to the world, especially India.”

India’s BJP party, which is currently out of power but could win the next election in May, shares that attitude, he said.

In other remarks, Shirley Ann Haber of the Speakers Action Group, remembered the mostly Hindu victims of the terrorists “and for them, we mourn the senseless killing of innocents. As well, in a country where there has been traditionally no anti-Semitism, the Jews were targeted – this was evident in the Chabad Center, the Jewish Learning and Study Community Center, where the young Rabbi Holtzberg and his young wife, six months pregnant, were murdered with the other visitors.”

Haber said the terrorists hoped to instil fear, deter tourism and destroy commercial relations. “But crucial is the hate – the hate of western society, the hate of the United States, the hate of the Jews, the hate of the Israelis.”

The rally was sponsored by Speakers Action Group, a charitable organization that promotes “tolerance and understanding through cross-cultural education,” the CHA, which represents hundreds of Hindus across Canada, and the Toronto Zionist Council.

The CHA’s website states that the organization supports “multi-faith initiatives with groups and people who share our values of democracy, liberty, and merit-based success.”

The Speakers Action Group and the CHA have collaborated on programs before. In February, the two sponsored “an interfaith evening to promote understanding by exploring our common history and build bridges between the Jewish and the Hindu community in Toronto,” Haber said.